AN INFORMAL INTRODUCTION TO WFMU

or

A Short Guide to Creative Radio for Fun and Non-Profit

WFMU - 91.1 FM
Upsala College
East Orange, N.J.

INTRODUCTION

If you are in possession of this highly classified document, there exists the strong possibility that you are planning--however capriciously--a stint at WFMU. Great! We're glad you made it this far. Already you are in a select minority.

There are many reasons why people approach WFMU: some think it would be fun to just sit around all day spinning the heavy new releases, assuming it takes no talent, intelligence, time or effort to do a radio show. Others want to impress that cute chick (or fella) behind the counter at Dunkin' Donuts with their incredible prestige. Still others aspire to the status of local celebrity party-hoppers who get instant recognition from all they meet. Hell--that's why we came here, but you may as well find out right off what it took us months to find out.

After persistent name dropping (of our own names) everywhere in the New York/New Jersey metropolitan area, we discovered that:

--There are several million people out there who have never heard of WFMU and aren't impressed.
--There are people who listen to the station all the time and still don't know who we are.
--There are people who listen to the station all the time, know who we are, and still aren't impressed.

It's certainly unfortunate, but if you want material success, immediate ego gratification, excessive sex and sidewalk recognition, you'd be better off becoming a model for Viva or a lifeguard than wasting your time here.

If, on the other hand, your desires have more to do with being involved in creative radio, this could be the beginning of a productive relationship. Please read on...

WHAT ARE WE?

WFMU says it is a radio station putting out 1440 watts of stereo power, which covers a radius of 50 miles when the wind is blowing in the right direction. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) tells us that we are a "non-commercial, educational station, licensed to Upsala College." That may not mean much to the average listener accustomed to WFMU's "free-form" or "progressive" format, but the FCC is the governmental agency which grants WFMU its license, and what the law giveth, the law can taketh away. That is, the FCC can revoke a station's license if it fails to live up to the spirit of federal broadcast regulations.

Many listeners think it's cool that we don't pollute the airwaves with commercials. Frankly, such credit is misgiven--we couldn't accept commercial sponsors if we wanted to. That's what the "non-commercial" in our license means. The FCC has specifically allocated the 88-92 megacycle FM band for non-commercial, educational use only, and WFMU at 91.1 falls within that spectrum. Fortunately, the guidelines governing these stations are deliberately broad, so as to allow for much interpretation of what individual licensees determine to be "educational." The FCC's purpose in granting us our license should not, however, simply be ignored or circumvented.

WHO DO WE THINK WE ARE?

WFMU's own self-image varies with the personality of each broadcaster, hence, the concept of "Free-Form Radio." The ideal situation would be one in which there is as much diversity as possible emanating from WFMU's spot on the dial. Music, discussion, poetry, drama, humor, documentary, personal monologues--all these have a place at WFMU, as does anything else within the scope of one's imagination.

WFMU as always tried to present an alternative approach to radio, not only in our musical programming but in our overall tone. Commercial radio tends to treat its listeners as: a) mindless b) commodities, or both. Our station tends to be a haven for people who generally don't like what radio usually has to offer.

In keeping with our commitment to alternative radio, WFMU is in the process of expanding our public affairs and other informational programming. Over the past number of months we've been airing such programs as "The Continuing Crisis", which deals primarily with housing problems, a weekly program with East Orange Mayor Thomas Cooke, Upsala's Hebrew and Jewish Program (daily), contemporary radio drama in Ear-play from National Public Radio and about a dozen other regularly scheduled features. This does not even scratch the surface of our programming when our free-form live radio shows are considered--which can include music of a wide (and we mean wide) variety; talk, phone-ins, live performances, drama, experimental radio and other features as the host may wish to broadcast.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR STATION MEMBERSHIP

In order to qualify as an "on-the-air" member of WFMU's staff, there are the following (inflexible) pre-requisites:

1. You must be a member of the "Upsala Community." This includes all registered students at Upsala College, full-or part-time, Day or Evening Division. Even if you're only taking one course without credit (which is not encouraged for those seeking to join the station), you are legally eligible. Or, you could be an employee of Upsala College, or an alumnus, or the Dean's son, etc.

2. You must procure a "Radio Telephone Third Class Operator Permit" or license with broadcast endorsement from the FCC, which isn't half as complicated as it sounds. In fact, it isn't complicated at all. Hell, we got ours and we don't know our ass from third base about the principles behind how human voices come out of that little box atop the night-table, much less how they get in there in the first place. There was a time when you had to go to the FCC office and take a test of your knowledge of basic electronics and Fcc rules and regulations. Now, all the FCC requires is that you fill out a simple form and mail it in. After it clanks around the FCC bureaucracy and the post office for a few weeks, voila'! Your license!

Bear in mind that even though the FCC doesn't require you to exhibit the knowledge they formerly did, WFMU still does. This is what "deregulation" is all about, we suppose.

3. You must go through WFMU's audition process. This requires you to make tapes (probably 3) of a sample hour radio program, which will be listened to by

station directors and staff members, who will in turn make suggestions and comments. The purpose of these tapes is to give us some idea as to your style of broadcasting, the quality of your voice, the range of your musical tastes, your creative potential, and the proficiency with the studio equipment.

Please be advised, however, that even if you are a student at Upsala, obtain your 3rd class license, go through the audition process and your father is Chairman of the Board of General Motors, you are not automatically guaranteed a slot on WFMU. Owing to broadcasting standards, however loose, we are not obligated to give everyone who applies a show of their own. Some do not demonstrate any particular ability to perform qualitatively (though everyone is to some degree awkward and accident-prone at first) and we must accept only people with some real potential. You are not, however, up against any percentages here. Each auditioner is judged individually and with an open mind. Much leeway is allowed to accomodate different styles (think "Free-Form"), so don't be afraid to do something different. That just might be your special qualification.

Don't be discouraged, even if you can't seem to get a license or are turned down for an on-the-air position. There is a place for people who are interested in being involved with WFMU in other capacities. Your help in keeping the station running (e.g., handling correspondence, writing news, tape production) can be rewarding to you, and would certainly be appreciated by us.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU'RE STILL INTERESTED

Now that you're familiar with the labyrinthine house of mirrors, that predicates station membership, it's up to you to decide if you still think you can be a positive addition to WFMU's staff. If you're still interested, it's time to act. Your first step is to obtain your license. Obtain the proper form and mail it to the FCC. The form can be obtained from the WFMU station manager.

We would suggest, at this point, that you start listening to the radio more intently than you perhaps have in the past. This will not only help to broaden your tastes, but will also help you develop a clearer understanding of the medium of radio. Listen to everything--the slick and the sloppy, the hip and the homey. Listen to stations that play all kinds of music, discussion, news. Listen to the religious stations. Listen to WFMU! Flip around the dials (AM & FM) and pay attention. You will discover styles of broadcasting, formats and music that you may not have realized existed. Find out what's effective and what makes it so. Many newcomers begin with only a vague sense of what they want to do and no idea how to accomplish it. You can give yourself an edge (and perhaps avoid making 42 audition tapes) if you start paying attention to what radio is all about.

Once you have obtained your license and know something about what you want to do, talk with the station manager. He will show you the basics of the studio and production room equipment and work out a convenient time to make your audition tapes.

Once you have made enough tapes to demostrate your ability and have been approved for the air, you will be asked to engineer a show for someone else on the air, just to prove to the world one last time your familiarity with the equipment and the program logs. You will then be an official WFMU broadcast personality and be entitled to commensurate privileges: material success, immediate ego gratification, excessive sex, and sidewalk recognition. And you won't even have to get wet or take off your clothes.

Guidebook by: P. Sobolik & I. Chusid
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